

# New directions

## in prevention

SUMMER 2003

Vermont Department of Health • Division of Alcohol & Drug Abuse Programs

Vermont's New Directions Coalitions have been putting research into practice. As a whole, they have been successful in reducing alcohol, cigarette and marijuana use among youth in their communities.

In 1997, Vermont was awarded a federal State Incentive Grant (called New Directions) as part of the federal Youth Initiative to reduce substance use among 12- to 17-year-olds. This three-year, \$8.9 million grant funded 23 community coalitions to carry out substance abuse prevention initiatives based on research. The majority of grant-funded activities took place from 1999 through 2001.



- Alcohol use in past 30 days
- Binge drinking in past 30 days
- Cigarette smoking in past 30 days
- Ever used marijuana
- Ever used alcohol
- Ever smoked cigarettes

- Ever used inhalants

This analysis is based in schools that participated each year in the 1997, 1999, and 2001 Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

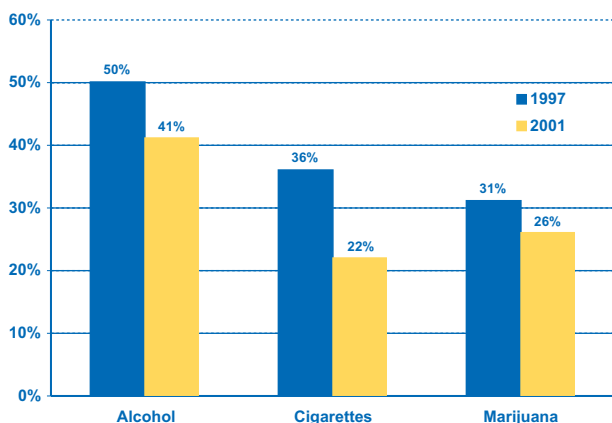
### Results Are Statistically Significant

The relatively greater declines in substance use among eighth through twelfth grade students experienced by New Directions communities, when compared with the rest of the state, are statistically significant for past 30-day use of marijuana and cigarettes, and lifetime use of marijuana and tobacco.

The figure below shows changes in the prevalence of past month use of alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana from 1997 to 2001 among Vermont students in grades 8 through 12. Based on the timing of the New Directions sponsored activities in most communities, program effects were expected primarily during the 1999 to 2001 period. For example, past month use of marijuana declined 2.7 percent more in the New Directions communities than in the rest of the state. These declines represent hundreds of students who may have been averted from using substances. While New Directions communities achieved reductions in past 30-day use, prevalence rates for alcohol, tobacco and marijuana use also declined (*continued on next page*)

**Reductions in Alcohol, Cigarette & Marijuana Use in New Directions Communities**

Percentage of students in grades 8-12 who used in past 30 days



## Community Coalitions speak out

as a result of New Directions



*Recently we interviewed a parent who participated in and, later, co-facilitated the Strengthening Families Program (a 14-session prevention program for parents and their children). What follows are some of her thoughts about the experience and about substance abuse prevention overall.*

**What originally attracted me to the class was the offer of dinner and baby-sitting two nights a week!** At the time I had four kids, age 5 and under, and I really needed a break.

I think that the Strengthening Families Program works because it gets at the root of the problem. The communication skills that I learned were great. **Now I use the different styles of positive discipline with my children.**

The course gave me a **grounding in what issues were ahead**, like, how to talk with my kids about drugs and alcohol. My oldest is 8 now. Before the course, I had no idea inhalant use starts so early. I've already talked with my daughter about it. I told her that if someone comes up to her and wants her to try something like that, tell an adult.

**My tool bag as a parent is a little bigger now.** The exchange of ideas with other parents was a big help. I got to see how other parents deal with the same issues. It also helped to see what other families are facing as their children get older.

**Talking with your children about alcohol and drug issues is part of what you do as a parent.** I have gone on to teach the children's program that is part of Strengthening Families. It's amazing what even little ones retain. I took my 3-year-old to a tobacco prevention performance—a Gorilla Theatre production of the "Three Little Pigs." In this version of the play, the wolf is a smoker. Some time later my 3-year-old reminded me that the wolf couldn't blow the pig's house down, because he smoked.

## INVOLVING YOUTH

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statewide. This is not surprising, since many communities who were not awarded a New Directions grant also carried out multiple prevention strategies with other resources.

### Coalition Characteristics

Specific analyses were conducted to identify which coalition characteristics were most highly associated with change in substance use prevalence measures.

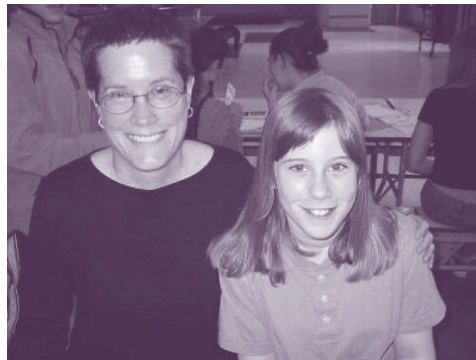
Greater declines in use of most substances were associated with coalitions that provided more opportunities for participation in:

- student assistance programs;
- school curricula;
- drug-free social and recreational programs; and
- projects designed to improve the community message discouraging alcohol and drug use including media and community awareness projects.

In addition, coalitions that served smaller populations, and were able to offer more contact and services per capita, showed greater declines. Finally, the greater the percentage of youth served and the more years that each program component was provided, the greater the reduction in substance use.

The evaluation suggests that collaborative, community-based efforts imple-

mented within a supportive framework, such as New Directions, can have a positive impact on the prevalence of substance use by students who live in these communities.



Connecting Youth in Chittenden South mentoring program participants sharing a moment at the end of the year Mentoring Celebration.

### Results by Grade Level

In general, the pattern of greater reductions in substance use in New Directions communities was seen across all grade levels. This finding may reflect the multifaceted and community-wide approach adopted by the coalitions, rather than the effects of any one program or activity.

Effects on initiation of alcohol use (as measured by any use in an individual's lifetime), were especially prominent for eighth grade students. Further analysis showed that New Directions communities that implemented Project Northlands,

a school- and family-based prevention program with a focus on transitioning through middle school alcohol-free, showed a 15 percent decrease (from 60 to 45) in the percent of 8th graders who had initiated alcohol use. This compares to a 10 percent decrease for all New Directions communities and a 5 percent decrease for the rest of the state.

New Directions coalitions that implemented middle school classroom curricula proven effective in helping to reduce alcohol, tobacco and marijuana use had considerably greater success in preventing initiation of substance use by 8th graders than New Directions coalitions that did not implement such curricula. This finding is important because early first use of substances has been linked to a greater likelihood of developing abuse or addiction problems later on in life.

### Mentoring and Family Education

Programs such as mentoring and family education programs that are designed to have a very strong impact on a small group of people in the community did not appear to impact substance use levels as measured by the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. However, that does not mean that those programs had no effect. It does suggest that impacts of these programs should be measured using tools other than the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, which is designed to measure community-wide trends in rates of student use.

When programs, particularly those targeted to a smaller group of youth, are implemented, change needs to be captured either by conducting evaluations with those youth specifically, or by using community-wide measures that will be more sensitive to the impact that such programs might have on the community.

### What opportunities did the New Directions Project provide to Vermont communities?

- Communities were able to put into place strategies that had been researched and shown to be effective in reducing substance use and abuse.
- Coalitions were funded as opposed to



Essex CHIPS at their annual coalition recognition event.

## COALITION SUCCESS

individual programs, and that funding was reliable over a three-year period.

- Coalitions were supported in developing sustainability plans.
- Coalitions received intensive technical assistance, including training, evaluation support and regular feedback to the community on their progress.
- Coalitions leaders met regularly as a group so that they could share ideas, successes, and challenges with each other.
- Communities and coalitions worked collaboratively with multiple state agencies in the oversight of the project.
- Coalitions served as a model for actively engaging youth in community change initiatives.



Connecting Youth Leadership Summit organized by Connecting Youth in Chittenden South coalition and Milton New Directions coalition.

Dr. Robert Flewelling, *Encouraging Findings Regarding Changes in Student Substance Use: An Outcome Evaluation of New Directions Based on Youth Risk Behavior Survey*, is available on the web at [www.state.vt.us/adap](http://www.state.vt.us/adap). ♦

## A National Perspective on the Evaluation of Vermont's New Directions Project

"I have just finished reading a summary of the Vermont New Directions Project.

"Vermont has provided clear and compelling evidence of the promise of comprehensive community coalitions.

"To my knowledge, never has a set of community led coalitions as a group demonstrated the impacts that the New Directions coalitions have. Significantly greater net declines with two different substances in the 23 New Directions communities; consistent net declines in favor of the New Direction communities across all dependent variables; and comparable pre-intervention rates between New Direction and non-New Direction communities all lend credibility to your results.

"I expect the work of your Vermont coalitions will be widely noticed and widely cited. Bravo to all involved!!"

Paul Florin, PhD  
University of Rhode Island

## Evaluation Report Available

A complete copy of the evaluation by



Vermont coalitions attend CADCA (Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America) conference in Washington D.C. and visit with Senator and Mrs. Jeffords.

## Coalitions speak out

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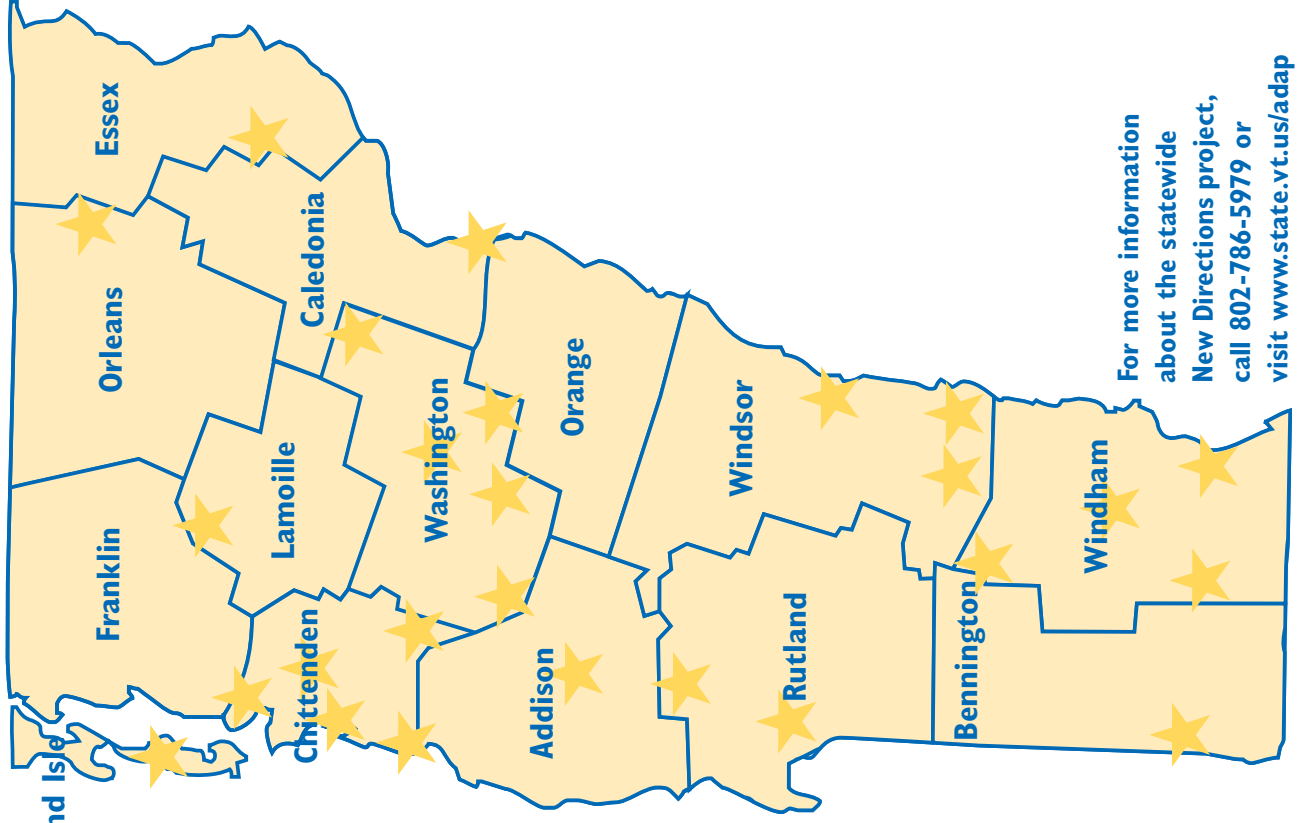
I've maintained a friendship with other members of the group. We would not have met if it were not for this program. I wish more people knew about Strengthening Families.

*(The Strengthening Families Program and Gorilla Theatre are offered through the Mt. Ascutney Prevention Partnership. Gorilla Theatre is a student theatre education group that gives performances on healthy development and substance abuse prevention. They work closely with a substance abuse counselor to develop their scripts.)*



# New Directions Coalitions

(Coalitions that have been or are currently being funded by New Directions.)



For more information  
about the statewide  
New Directions project,  
call 802-786-5979 or  
visit [www.state.vt.us/adap](http://www.state.vt.us/adap)

Vermont  
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